

Thursday 8th December 2011

The Third Day: start of the detailed work

The Seventh Review Conference of the 1972 Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention (BWC/BTWC) continued with four further statements as part of the general debate, before starting the article-by-article review and finishing with the first informal plenary.

General debate

The statements made to the Review Conference on Wednesday morning as part of the general debate were by the Netherlands, the United States, Nigeria and Iran. Two of these attracted more than usual attention; the first being given by Minister of Foreign Affairs Uri Rosenthal and the second by Secretary of State Hilary Clinton. Minister Rosenthal stated that the Netherlands was honoured to presiding over the Review Conference. Secretary Clinton announced a 'Bio-Transparency and Openness Initiative' with few details provided at this stage, but otherwise said little that was new. [Perhaps more notable than anything that was said was what was *not* said. Most high-level US Government statements regarding the BWC over the last decade have been ideologically driven and of a style that can hinder debate. This statement was different in tone. Secretary Clinton's presence had one particular impact – it raised the political profile of the BWC without bringing with it any significant politically divisive baggage.] Nigeria stressed the importance of Article X and announced it would hold a national sensitisation workshop on the BWC sometime in 2012. Iran also spoke on Article X, and reiterated its earlier proposal for a mechanism to review transfer denials.

Article-by-article review

This review is being carried out by the Committee of the Whole with Ambassador Desra Percaya (Indonesia) in the Chair. This started after the general debate statements and dealt with Articles I to IV. The aim was to do a first run through each Article and allow delegates to discuss the overall approach they would like to take for each Article in the final document. This approach allows for delegates to raise ideas and, if there are proposals for text to be included, circulate these on paper by the time of the second reading. As part of the article-by-article review, delegates also identified some language from reports from the inter-sessional process that may be useful to include in the final document. The advantage of including language from these reports is that they were already adopted by consensus.

First informal plenary – science and technology

The traditional review processes of the Conference are to be punctuated by informal plenary sessions on cross-cutting issues which do not easily fit within individual articles of the BWC. This also provides a format to discuss decisions and recommendations from the Sixth Review Conference. The subject under discussion on Wednesday afternoon was science and technology, and in particular how reviews of the implications of such developments might be carried out. Key questions on this topic had been posed by the President of the Conference. For example, what should be the structure of any kind of review; who should be involved;

should the review be general or on particular topics (and if so, how should such topics be selected); how should any conclusions be reached; and how should any conclusions be used?

Key starting points for the discussion were the working papers by India (WP.3) and by Australia, Japan and New Zealand (WP.13) as well as the information circulated in background document INF.5. The aim of the session was not to come to any immediate conclusions, but to allow an open discussion that could inform preparations for the final documentation, including decisions and recommendations, of the Review Conference.

Statements from non-governmental organizations

There was an opportunity for NGOs to address the Conference in an informal session on Tuesday afternoon. A total of 19 statements were made during this session [apologies for incorrectly reporting this as 17 earlier]. Statements were heard in the following order: University of Bradford; London School of Economics; International Network of Engineers and Scientists; Biosecurity Working Group of the Inter-Academy Panel on International Issues; Defence Medical College of Japan and Bradford Disarmament Research Centre; VERTIC; Harvard Sussex Program; Biosafety and Biosecurity International Conference, International Council for the Life Sciences; Stockholm International Peace Research Institute; Research Group for Biological Arms Control at the University of Hamburg; MJ Lawrence Consulting; Global Biological Research Centres Network; Institute for Security Studies, South Africa; Ithaca; International Federation of Biosafety Associations; Steering Committee of the Pugwash Study Group on the Implementation of the Chemical and Biological Weapons Conventions; Ferdous International Foundation; The James Martin Centre for Nonproliferation Studies; and Pax Christi International.

Conference documents

The paper by China on its views on strengthening the effectiveness of the BWC, previously available as an advance version, was issued on Tuesday as BWC/CONF.VII/WP.24. Papers circulated on Wednesday were: information from further States Parties on implementation of Article X (INF.8/Add.1); a copy in Russian of Monday's plenary statement by Belarus on behalf of the CSTO (INF.9) and a working paper by France entitled 'Vers la responsabilisation des parties prenantes' [Promoting responsibility of stakeholders] (WP.27).

Side Events

Three side events were held on Wednesday. The first, before the start of the formal proceedings, was convened by the Harvard Sussex Program on the subject of 'Science and Technology Reviews under the BWC'. Presentations were given by James Revill and Kai Ilchmann and the event was chaired by Ambassador Serhiy Komisarenko (Ukraine). Details of the research project can be found at <<http://hsp.sussex.ac.uk/sandtreviews/>>.

Two side events were held in parallel during the lunch break. One was convened by Romania and the ISU on 'Advances in Biotechnology – A Potential Source of Proliferation of Biological Agents'. The event was introduced by Ambassador Maria Ciobanu (Romania) with presentations by Malcolm Dando (Bradford University), Kathryn Nixdorff (INES), Todd Kuiken (Woodrow Wilson Center for International Scholars) and Adrain Eremia (Ministry of National Defence, Romania). The event was chaired by Richard Lennane (ISU). The other lunchtime event was 'Case Study: Expanding the Availability of medical Countermeasures for Biodefense in Europe', convened by MJ Lawrence Consulting <<http://www.mjiconsulting.eu>> with a presentation by Mark Johnson.

This is the fourth report from the Seventh Review Conference of the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention which is being held from 5 to 22 December 2011 in Geneva. The reports are designed to help people who are not in Geneva to follow the proceedings. Copies of these reports and those from the earlier meetings are available via <<http://www.bwpp.org/reports.html>>.

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